



Applying an Equity Lens in Schools

A “lens” is a metaphor to communicate the idea of looking at an event, experience, and/or a set of data through a particular perspective. One can look at what is occurring and construct an interpretation and a subsequent action based on the mental model or “lens” being employed at any given time. Each of us views the world through a set of lenses everyday – it is how we read and make meaning of the world. Applying an equity lens in a school community helps us intentionally sharpen our focus on the ways in which school structures, routines, and adult interactions may be negatively impacting (often unconsciously) student experiences and academic outcomes, particularly for students who have been historically underserved. For each question, one should consider looking for patterns that emerge for particular subgroups of students (or parents).

Below are a set of starting questions focused primarily on teaching and the adult school culture:

Student Outcomes & Experiences

- What student achievement outcomes and/or experiences are associated with particular subgroups of students?
- Which students are routinely experiencing disciplinary responses, and for what reasons?
- Are literacy rates comparable across different subgroups of students?
- Are the results of benchmark and standardized assessments comparable across different subgroups of students?
- How are English Language Learners and students with IEPs and 504s accessing grade-level content and experiencing academic growth?
- Are school promotion and graduation rates consistently high for all subgroups?
- Which students have limited access to enrichment opportunities?
- Which students don’t feel known well or valued in the classroom or school? What patterns do we see among these students, in terms of race, gender, home language, sexual identity, etc.?
- What authentic opportunities exist for students to offer feedback on their experiences and give voice to what matters to them?

Teacher Stances & Practices

- Are teachers modeling a “fixed” or “growth mindset” in their expectations and interactions with students, especially for those struggling the most?
- Are teachers implementing a wide variety of ways for students to demonstrate understanding and mastery of skills and knowledge?
- Are teachers using culturally responsive teaching approaches and strategies to meet the learning needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?
- Are students being given opportunities to speak and write in their home language, as well as share personal experiences and their culture as part of their learning?
- Are teachers effectively using instructional modifications for students with IEPs and/or 504s?
- Are teachers using effective language development strategies for English Language Learners?
- Are all students being asked relevant and higher order thinking skills questions through thoughtful scaffolding and support?
- Are teachers communicating messages of high expectations combined with supports for every student?

Staff Discourse & Culture

- How does the staff discuss root causes of disproportionate patterns of academic outcomes and/or experiences (e.g. language of complaint and blame vs. language of commitment and possibilities)?
- Are teachers having rigorous discourse about student learning through analyzing student work and learning results?
- Do teachers authentically give and seek constructive feedback in service of continuous learning, growth, and development?
- Are teachers thinking critically about how their cultural values, experiences, and preferred learning styles (often operating unconsciously) impact their teaching approaches and interactions with students?
- What is the level of relational trust among and across the staff, especially across racial lines? (e.g., respect, personal regard, integrity)
- To what extent does staff participate in on-going gossip? What impact is this having?
- Are there conditions that make it “safe enough” to talk about sensitive and/or uncomfortable topics such as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, or “unearned advantage” (e.g., white privilege)?

Parents & Families

- Do parents (especially parents of color) feel welcomed and respected at the school?
- Do parents have complete access to information in a language or form of communication that is accessible (i.e., written form, translator)?
- Do communications home recognize the progress and accomplishments of all students?
- Are parents of students of color present and authentically engaged in school events, activities, and committees?
- Are there flexible meetings (dates and times) for parent engagement (e.g., parent-teacher conferences, committees, volunteering, etc.)?
- Do teachers create authentic partnerships with the parents of students who are most struggling? Do teachers take an authentic inquiry stance to learn more about their students as people (e.g., their hobbies, assets, experiences)?
- Are there any unconscious and/or explicit assumptions and/or judgments about any particular group of parents?
- How is the school authentically taking an assets-approach toward building and making connections to the surrounding community in which their school resides?